

you make it so easy (to fall so hard)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77242946) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77242946>.

Rating: [Mature](#)
Archive Warning: [No Archive Warnings Apply](#)
Category: [M/M](#)
Fandoms: [Heated Rivalry \(TV\)](#), [Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid](#)
Relationship: [Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov](#)
Characters: [Shane Hollander](#), [Ilya Rozanov](#), [Yuna Hollander](#), [Wyatt Hayes](#), [Harris Drover](#), [Troy Barrett](#), [Zane Boodram](#), [Brandon Wiebe](#), [Anya](#), [Ilya Rozanov's Dog](#), [Evan Dykstra](#), [Luca Haas](#), [David Hollander](#), [Svetlana Vetrova](#), [Irina Rozanova](#), [Ottawa Centaurs Team Ensemble \(Game Changers\)](#)
Additional Tags: [5+1 Things](#), [Hockey](#), [Inspired by Heated Rivalry \(TV\)](#), [Post-Book 6: The Long Game \(Game Changers\)](#), [mostly after the long game](#), [the first one takes place while shane is in montreal](#), [oh mentioning the teams is a good idea](#), [Ottawa Centaurs \(Game Changers\)](#), [Montreal Voyageurs \(Game Changers\)](#), [Explicit Language](#), [Non-Explicit Sex](#), [i know i hate myself for not having smut in this](#), [Homophobic Language](#), [Implied/Referenced Suicide](#), [Comfort No Hurt](#), [well there is a little hurt but not much](#), [and shane fixes it](#), [Protective Shane Hollander](#), [Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander](#), [Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov](#), [POV Ilya Rozanov](#), [Fluff](#), [Emotional](#), [Married Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov](#), [Established Relationship](#), [Domestic Fluff](#), [it's been so long since i tagged something so we may be adding more later yay](#), [the cottage](#), [the cottage should be its own character tag](#), [Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov Relationship Timeline Reveal](#), [But Like A Small One](#), [BAMF Shane Hollander](#), [it's been more than a month since I posted this and I'm still out here adding tags](#), [see](#), [I told y'all!!!!](#)
Language: [English](#)
Series: [Part 1 of where's the trophy? he just comes running over to me](#)
Stats: Published: 2026-01-07 Words: 12,986 Chapters: 1/1

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by [brunettereader](#)

Summary

Ilya knows that, between him and Shane, he's the more affectionate of the two. He's not sure if it's because he's from Europe, where everyone greets each other with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, or if it's because he grew up so starved for love and affection that he can't do anything except show Shane how much he loves him at any chance that he has.

So, yes, he knows that he's the one most likely to kiss Shane on the cheek when he skates by him at practice or come up behind Shane when he's cooking dinner just to wrap his arms around him or fall on top of Shane while he's reading on the couch, desperate to have his skin touching Shane's.

But, Shane... Shane loves Ilya differently. It's quieter. More intentional.

—

Or, five times that Shane loved Ilya in his quiet way, and one time that he loved Ilya loudly.

Notes

I got tired of seeing all of the fics about Ilya loving Shane a lot, but Shane loves Ilya so much, too!!! He's just not as loud as Shane, but that doesn't mean Shane loves Ilya any less.

This is also more like maybe two ways that Shane loved Ilya in small ways and four times that Shane had no chill in how he loved Ilya, but that doesn't work for a 5+1 format, now does it?

Thanks to [Char](#), who read this when it was in pieces, left comments, and cheered me on as I wrote.

Finally, thanks to my brother, who will never read this but who did get me a keyboard for my tablet on which most of this story was written.

Title comes from the song "So Easy" by Phillip Phillips

Please note that there are a few triggering moments in this fic, which are outlined below. Just click on the toggle to see them, but they are mildly spoiler-y. Take care of yourself first and foremost.

► **CONTENT WARNINGS:**

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

- Translation into Русский available: [так легко \(тебя любить\)](#) by [isolated_track](#)

December 2018

Ilya wakes up one morning and can't understand why his body hurts. He mentally runs through the game the previous night against Buffalo, but he doesn't remember any particularly hard hits. And it's not anything like normal body aches for a hockey player, either. The sheets feel too rough on his skin, but he also wants to burrow even deeper into them.

Ilya ignores that desire, and instead, he rolls over to grab his phone. He has a text from Shane, saying that they landed in Denver. The text came in late, even factoring in the two-hour time difference. Shane has been on this long road trip for nearly two weeks, and they're going to have just a day together before Ilya jets off to California for games in Anaheim, Los Angeles, and San Jose.

Ilya knows they are closer than they were when he was in Boston, but he still hates it. He sends off a quick morning text to Shane before he gets out of bed, hoping a hot shower helps his sore body.

It doesn't. Instead, his head starts throbbing, and his sinuses are sore as hell. Still, he makes the drive to the rink, but as soon as he walks in, Bood sends him to the team doctor, who promptly diagnoses Ilya with the flu and sends him *back* home with medicine and strict orders to rest and check in with him tomorrow.

Guess Ilya won't be making at least part of the California trip. It's nearly 10 am when he walks back into his house, so he texts Shane.

>> Shane
I have the flu.

Within a minute, Shane calls him.

"You have the flu?" he asks.

Ilya plops onto the couch with a huff. "Hello, to you, too, my sweet boyfriend. How are you?"

Ilya can practically hear Shane's eye roll, despite the fact that they're in different countries. "What did the team doctor say?" Shane asks, pointedly ignoring Ilya's snark.

"Gave me medicine and told me to check in with him tomorrow," Ilya responds. "Probably going to miss at least the first game on the California trip."

"Oh, baby," Shane practically coos. "I'm sorry."

"Eh, it's early," he replies with a wave of his hand, which he realizes too late that Shane can't see. "Won't be a big deal to miss one game. Plus, maybe we'll have an extra day together."

"That's true," Shane says. "Is there anything I can do? Order groceries or food for delivery?"

"No," he says with a shake of the head. "I have some food and your protein drinks."

"But you hate those."

"I hate the idea of going to the store more."

Shane sighs. "Well, I'm going to send something. No sense in eating stuff you hate."

Ilya smiles despite himself. His boyfriend, ever Mr. Practical. He wants to, again, tell Shane not to worry about him, that he's just going to knock out for the next day until he gets here, but he knows that Shane isn't going to take no for an answer.

Despite knowing Shane is up to something, he's still shocked when, an hour later, he answers his front door to see Yuna Hollander standing on his porch, arms full of groceries, with her purse and laptop bag slung over her shoulder.

"Hi, Ilya," she says warmly. "Shane said you were sick."

"Uh," Ilya responds hazily. "Yes. Flu."

"Well," Yuna says. "I picked up some essentials and ingredients for chicken noodle soup. Can I come in?"

Ilya steps to the side, and Yuna walks in. She and David helped Shane and Ilya move him into the house, and she seems to remember her way around. He follows her for a minute, wanting to offer to take some of her bags but unsure if he should.

"I got this," she says as she starts pulling chicken broth and vegetables out of one bag. "Go sit on the couch for a minute."

And, because Ilya's brain is foggy, he does.

He pulls his phone out to send Shane a text.

>> Shane
Your mother is here

>> Shane
You said something. I thought soup.

<< Shane
I mean, Mom will make you soup if that's what you want.

>> Shane

I think she is making soup, but I don't want soup.

>> Shane

I want you.

<< Shane

I know, baby. I'm sorry I can't be there, but I promise you — I sent the second-best person.

Ilya doesn't answer that immediately. To be honest, he's a little intimidated by Yuna.

She's intense, to say the least. About *everything*. About the recently announced Irina Foundation, about hockey, about Shane, about what she cooks when they come over. Hell, she's intense about *Yahtzee*.

And now Yuna is here. In his house.

His phone buzzes in his hand with another text from Shane.

<< Shane

Your silence makes me think you're freaking out.

>> Shane

Am not freaking out. Russians are calm always.

<< Shane

Yep, totally freaking out. Don't. You're in good hands.

Ilya huffs and sinks lower into the couch. He can hear Yuna moving in his kitchen, bags rustling as she puts away whatever groceries she brought.

He's chewing on his thumbnail when Yuna joins him in the living room. She has a cup of tea in her hand, which she extends to Ilya when she reaches the couch.

"Made you an herbal tea," she says. "It will help your throat."

"Thank you," he replies before taking a sip. Damn, the tea is the perfect temperature, and the first sip does help his sore throat. He sighs before putting the tea on the coffee table.

"Listen, Yuna," he starts, but she tuts at him before he can keep going.

"Ilya, I know this is a lot," Yuna says, apparently utilizing the same sixth sense her son has of knowing when Ilya is about to decline help. "I know that you've been on your own for a

while. If you want me to go, I will, even though Shane made me promise not to let you chase me away."

Ilya huffs at that, not even surprised at Shane pulling that move.

"But, what if we make a deal instead?" she asks.

"Okay," Ilya says. "What kind of deal?"

"I'll make my famous chicken noodle soup," she says. "You'll rest and have a bowl when it's ready. If you're still not comfortable with me being here, I'll go, and at least I'll know that your fridge is stocked and you have something healthy to eat."

Ilya hums, thinking over the deal. It *would* be better to have something homemade and good than whatever he was going to order for delivery. *Definitely* better than the chalky protein shakes Shane drinks.

"Well," he finally says. "Shane has said that your chicken noodle soup is very good."

She smiles at him. "Well then, let me get on it."

—

Yuna ends up staying. Ilya wishes he could blame the chicken noodle soup — which he had two bowls of — but really, Yuna was right. He *has* been on his own for a long time, and he honestly can't remember anyone other than his mother and, more recently, Shane taking care of him when he was sick.

And Yuna has gone above and beyond. After he ate, she sent him upstairs for a nap. While he was sleeping, she meal-prepped some easy breakfasts and lunches for the next few days, grabbed all of the blankets strewn around the house and washed them, *and* cleaned the kitchen.

When Ilya finally stumbled downstairs after a couple of hours of feverish sleep, he couldn't believe the state of his house.

Now, he's settled into the couch under one of the freshly cleaned blankets, breathing in the detergent smell that reminds him of Shane. He misses Shane, suddenly and acutely, so he pulls out his phone to text him.

>> Shane
Your mother cleaned.

>> Shane
And cooked.

>> Shane
All of the cups are clean, Shane.

<< Shane
She does that.

<< Shane
She also told me you were sleeping. How do you feel?

>> Shane
Better. Still tired. And craving more soup.

<< Shane
Man, I'm so jealous.

>> Shane
Of me or your mother?

<< Shane
Yes.

Ilya smiles before he replies.

>> Shane
Good luck tonight. Love you.

<< Shane
Love you.

Then, Yuna walks into the living room with a bowl of something that smells delicious and a Gatorade (purple, his favorite).

"Ramen sound good?" she asks.

"Yes, perfect," he replies.

She hands him the bowl and the drink before retreating into the kitchen. Ilya looks at the clock and sees that Shane's game starts soon. He flips the TV on to the pre-game broadcast.

A minute later, Yuna comes back with her own bowl, a glass of water, and a book tucked under her arm.

They eat quietly and listen to the talking heads make predictions for the game. When they're done, Yuna takes the bowls to the kitchen and returns before the puck drops.

The first period passes with the two in a comfortable silence except for when Shane scores (twice, with barely five minutes of game time between them). Ilya sits bundled up on the

couch, trying not to shiver, while Yuna sits in the armchair next to him, occasionally working on a crossword puzzle but mostly watching Montreal trounce Colorado.

During the first intermission, she seems content to continue sitting in silence, but Ilya feels an urge to try to connect with the woman who raised Shane Hollander.

"You watch all of Shane's games?" he finally asks.

"Of course," she kindly answers. She doesn't look up from her crossword.

"That's nice," he replies. "I think Shane likes knowing someone is cheering for him."

She hums softly in response before looking up at Ilya. "We watch all of yours, too, Ilya," she finally says.

"Oh," he says, a bit shocked. He knows that she's only known about Shane and him for almost a year and a half, but he's oddly touched. "But only when we're not at the same time?" He says it with a smirk, trying to make a joke.

He misses the mark, though, because the look that crosses Yuna's face is confusing to Ilya. It flips from shocked to sad to a soft smile at the end.

"No, honestly, you should see our den set-up now," she says. "We got another TV because we got tired of trying to keep up with the games on the split screen."

Ilya doesn't know what to say now. They bought another TV and set it up in their family room to watch Ilya and Shane when they play on different streams at the same time?

Yuna seems to understand that Ilya is taken aback because she jumps in. "You know," she says with a shrug, that same soft smile on her face. "We gotta watch both of our boys."

Ilya attributes what happens next to his illness, 100 percent. Because all he can say is a very wobbly, "Oh," and he swallows hard and bites his tongue to keep from crying. And then, the chill that's been wracking his body for the last twenty minutes causes him to violently shiver before he sinks further into the couch.

Yuna's face changes to a look of concern. "Are you cold?" she asks.

Ilya unearths one hand to wave it dismissively. "Is just a draft," he says.

Yuna clearly doesn't believe him because she stands, and before Ilya can really grasp what she's doing, she presses her hand lightly to his forehead. She immediately starts frowning.

"You're warm," she says. "But not burning up."

Ilya isn't really paying attention because he's leaning into her cool hand, eyes closed, lost in a memory of his mother doing the same thing.

"Moy sladkiy mal'chik," she'd say as she pushed his sweaty hair off his forehead when he was sick or after practice, her hand cool against his warm skin. Moy sladkiy mal'chik. My sweet

boy.

His eyes burn, tears threatening to spill. He sniffles wetly, and Yuna looks troubled.

"Oh, sorry, I should have aske—" she starts as she begins pulling her hand away, but Ilya huffs at her retreat despite himself. Yuna catches it and puts her hand back. "Oh, okay, never mind."

She sits on the couch at Ilya's hip, hand pressed to his cheek. They don't say anything for a while, and she eventually moves her hand up to run her fingers through his curls. Ilya leans into it and lets himself be needy for a minute. He's so glad Yuna is here, but he also misses his mom. Grief is like that.

Finally, Yuna breaks the silence. "I always wanted a son with curly hair," she says.

Ilya swallows hard. "Lucky me, then," he says.

"No," Yuna says, smiling. "Lucky *me*."

Ilya laughs then, the dour mood lifting. He brings his hand up to wipe his eyes, and Yuna stands up, her hand falling away.

"Let me get you something to help with that fever," she says, and then she's gone, disappearing into the kitchen.

By the end of the second intermission, he's not shivering anymore, and he and Yuna talk casually through the third period.

It's well after 11 when Ilya finally convinces Yuna that he's fine and that she should go home. She only agrees after Ilya promises that, for the rest of the night, he's just going to call Shane and then go to bed.

She presses a kiss to the top of his head as she passes him on the couch to the door.

"Come over for dinner when you're feeling up for it," she says as she leaves.

Ilya nods, fully intending to reach out at his first chance. He's almost shocked to find he's looking forward to it.

She closes the door behind her, and Ilya locks up from his phone. He heads to the kitchen, planning to put away the cups Yuna cleaned or something, but everything is clean and back in its place.

Ilya smiles and then heads upstairs. Once he's settled in, he shoots Shane a text.

>> Shane
Can you talk?

Shane answers his text with a FaceTime request.

Ilya quickly answers the call, and his heart melts when Shane's face pops up, glasses on and hair ruffled.

"Ilya, baby, hi," Shane says.

"Hi," he replies. "Good game tonight."

Shane shrugs in response, as if to say *Well, you know*. God, how Ilya loves him.

Before he can say that, though, Shane jumps into a different conversation. "How are you feeling?"

He smiles despite himself. "Still shitty, but I'm... happy."

Shane's face lights up. "Yeah?"

Ilya nods. "Yeah, it was nice. Having your mom take care of me." He swallows thickly, emotions welling up again. "Reminded me of my mother taking care of me when I was young."

"I'm glad," Shane replies. He's still smiling when he says, "I was hoping Mom being around would help."

Ilya feels his stomach swoop with affection for his boyfriend, who knew what Ilya needed before Ilya did. He's not sure he'll ever get used to the thoughtful and intentional ways that Shane Hollander loves him.

"Still," Shane continues. "I'm sorry I couldn't be there."

Ilya shrugs. "It's okay," he says. "I had the second-best thing."

Shane smiles. "She loves you, you know?" he says.

"Me too," he says. "Is nice. To have a mom again."

Shane reaches out and presses a kiss to the screen.

"Our flight gets in tomorrow afternoon," he says. "I'll head straight there."

"No need to rush," he says. "Your mother stocked my kitchen."

"Honestly, that doesn't surprise me," Shane says while shaking his head. "But I'm still coming over. I want to see you. Being away when I know you're sick is so damn hard. Especially after Mom sent me that picture."

Ilya narrows his eyes. "What picture?"

"Oh, just this one of you dozing on the couch, phone in hand," Shane says with a smirk.

Ilya huffs. "I've been betrayed."

"Noooo, it was sweet," Shane says. "And don't get mad at Mom. I asked her for proof of life."

"Oh, you need proof of life?" Ilya asks, his smile turning dirty.

Shane laughs. "There's my Ilya," he says. "I'll be home tomorrow to nurse you back to health."

"Nurse me back to health with blow jobs?" he asks.

"Well," Shane says, drawing out the end of the word. "If that's what the doctor ordered."

Ilya just laughs.

October 2021

It's barely even 8 am, and Ilya is already done with today.

Well, technically, Ilya's disdain for today really started last night, after their game versus Philly. The locker room had been buzzing with energy, everyone excited about the win, music playing (not Dykstra's for once, thank *fuck*). So when Harris had asked if Ilya minded fielding a few questions from the press, Ilya had happily agreed.

"Ilya," Trent from The Athletic had started. "It's only the third week of the season, but the Centaurs are off to a blazing start. You've won eight of your last ten games. What do you think is the reason for that?"

Ilya actually liked Trent a lot. He was good at toeing the line between the hard questions and easy ones like the one he'd just asked, which was why Ilya felt comfortable joking around with him.

"You mean, aside from my very sexy husband, Shane Hollander, who joined the team in the offseason?" he'd asked with a smirk. All of the reporters had chuckled except one, which in hindsight, should have been a red flag in Ilya's head.

From the stall next to him, Shane had said, "Ilya." It had been a warning, one that Ilya decided to heed. For now, at least.

"I'm kidding," he'd said. "Of course, it doesn't hurt that we have the second-best player on the team with me, the *best* player of our generation." Ilya didn't have to look at Shane to know he was rolling his eyes. "But this is a good group of guys, even before Hollander. We had a good run at the end of last season, and we are ready to push it further, to see how far we can go."

Trent had smiled at Ilya, pleased with the sound bite. Ilya had looked around at the scrum for the next question.

He hadn't waited long.

"Matthew Conway, The Ottawa Daily," one guy said. It was the reporter who hadn't laughed at Ilya's earlier joke.

He wasn't the usual reporter from The Ottawa Daily, but Ilya distantly remembered that the usual girl had mentioned that she was getting married during the scrum after their last home game. They must have sent this guy instead.

"Hi, Matthew," Ilya had replied. As a rule of thumb, he tried to be nice to new reporters until they gave him a reason not to be.

Conway hadn't bothered with niceties, just dove into his question. "This is your fifth game without a goal."

And just like that, Ilya had no reason to be nice to this guy anymore.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Shane tense. The chatter in the locker room dried up. The other reporters were either exchanging glances or looking at the guy like he'd grown a third arm. Behind the reporters, Harris had been shaking his head, eyes wide as saucers.

Ilya didn't count himself as particularly superstitious when it came to hockey, but he did believe that mentioning a slump was a sure-fire way to make sure it stuck around.

"I'm aware," Ilya had said, unwilling to say anything after that.

Quite frankly, he was one of the best players in the damn league. Few people worked as hard as he did, one of them being his husband in the stall next to him, who was now fully locked in on the conversation.

Ilya hadn't gotten to where he was without being intimately familiar with how well his game was or wasn't at any given moment.

When he hadn't said anything else, Conway had waved his hand and then said, "Care to elaborate?"

"No," Ilya had replied.

"Really?" Conway had asked. When Ilya hadn't deigned to respond to *that*, Conway continued. "Do you think the slump is because you have more distractions this year?"

"And by 'distractions,' I assume you mean the fact that my husband is on the same team as me, yes?" Ilya had replied, each word clipped.

"Well," Conway had continued. "It could definitely be a reason."

"No, it definitely is not," Ilya had said. "Let me tell you what is *definite*. It's *definite* that we're going to make the play-offs this year. It's *definite* that we're going to be a real contender for the Cup. It's *definite* that I'm going to be one of the top goal scorers in the league by the end of the season."

He'd started the scrum sitting in his stall, but he'd been standing by the end of his rant. He towered over Conway, and Ilya had used that to his advantage.

"And one more fucking *definite* thing," he'd continued, his accent thick with his fury. "I'm *definitely* going to do all of that with my husband by my side because he only makes this team better, makes *me* better, and anyone who suggests otherwise doesn't know a fucking thing, and they sure as hell shouldn't be asking stupid fucking questions to someone who is twice their size."

And then he'd pushed through the reporters and headed for the showers.

When he'd gotten in the car to drive home, Shane was already there, in the passenger seat, with the car running as he scrolled on his phone. When Ilya got in, Shane had quickly locked his phone, making the screen go black. He'd most likely been on Twitter, probably checking if the interaction had made it online yet.

Ilya just huffed as he pulled on his seatbelt.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Shane had asked.

"No," Ilya replied as he put the car in gear.

Shane nodded, but he still looked pensive. Ilya recognized the face as the one he usually made when he was trying to decide the best way to navigate Ilya's mood. He loved Shane so much, and he hated that he was sometimes a puzzle Shane had to solve.

Finally, Shane had asked, "*Will* you want to talk about it?"

Shane knew him so well.

Ilya had sighed as he carefully backed out and drove toward the parking lot exit.

"I don't know," he'd said as he pulled onto the road. "Maybe. Probably."

"Okay," was all Shane had said in reply, and then he'd reached across the console and taken Ilya's hand.

Ilya was still mad, but he'd felt marginally better as Shane rubbed his thumb over Ilya's knuckles.

By the time they got home and went to bed, Ilya still hadn't felt like talking, still felt like he was processing his emotions. He knew it was silly and that Shane would be upset if he knew, but he didn't want to talk to Shane until he had a better grip on his anger.

So, Ilya spent the night tossing and turning, debating whether he should check social media to see what people were saying but mostly worrying if Conway had somehow been right.

Was Ilya distracted by Shane? Had they made a mistake when they decided to join the same team? Would his star crash while Shane's soared? Could they both be powerhouses when they had to share the spotlight?

He wanted nothing more than for Shane to show Montreal that they'd made the biggest mistake in their franchise history by letting him go. But could that happen if Ilya was playing just as hard?

Would Shane still love him if he was a second-rate player?

He knew this train of thought was ridiculous and, frankly, unhealthy, but Shane was sleeping, and Ilya couldn't make his brain quiet.

As the sun rose, Ilya felt wired, so he'd kissed Shane on the top of his head, scratched Anya behind the ears, and then gone downstairs for a brutal workout, hoping he could silence his demons, even if just for a little bit.

He's finishing a set on the rowing machine when Shane walks in. He doesn't say anything as he passes Ilya, just presses a kiss to his cheek. He's still giving him space but close by in case

Ilya is ready to talk.

By the time they go to the kitchen to make breakfast, Ilya is feeling better. It didn't hurt that Shane had been doing yoga in his tiny shorts, but Ilya is just a man at the end of the day. A man who'd started the day by blowing his very hot husband.

He finally decides to check his phone, which he'd purposefully left in the kitchen the night before, while he scrambles eggs.

There are a bunch of texts from his team, all of them checking in, but he ignores them and instead clicks on a few texts from Harris, sent pretty late last night.

<< Harris Drover

I'm so sorry about that guy.

<< Harris Drover

I NEVER would have let him in if I knew he was going to do that.

<< Harris Drover

I've banned him from the facilities, and I'm going to call the Daily first thing in the morning and tell them that reporters who are lowkey homophobic aren't allowed on Centaur premises.

<< Harris Drover

Well, I probably can't say he's homophobic, but I am going to call the Daily.

<< Harris Drover

Troy is telling me that I'm freaking out, so I'm done for now. I'm still sorry. I'll check in with you tomorrow.

Ilya smiles at the texts. He really does like Harris, and he feels bad that he'd probably made his night and morning difficult, even if Harris is backing him up.

>> Harris Drover

It's okay.

>> Harris Drover

It was not your fault. Thank you for kicking him out.

>> Harris Drover

Also, sorry for complicating your day.

Almost immediately, the texts are marked as read and a bubble pops up that shows Harris is typing, so Ilya waits for his reply, which doesn't take very long.

<< Harris Drover

You have nothing to apologize for. No one fucks with my boys. 🐎🏹❤️❤️

Ilya exits out of the thread with Harris and then scrolls up to the top and sees the latest text is from Wiebe.

<< Coach Wiebe

Can you come in this morning? I want to talk about last night.

He groans when he finishes reading the text.

"What?" Shane asks from the bar, where he's cutting up fruit. "Also, you're burning the eggs."

"Shit, fuck," Ilya curses before he moves the eggs off the burner. "Wiebe wants me to come in this morning."

"Why?"

"He wants to talk about last night."

"Oh," Shane says. He's quiet for a minute as he divides the fruit into two bowls. "It's Wiebe, though, it can't be too bad."

"Yeah, you're probably right." Ilya is plating the eggs when his phone pings with a new email. He sits next to Shane, and they trade plates. Then, Ilya clicks on the notification, and a preview of the email pops up.

MAJOR LEAGUE HOCKEY OFFICES OF PLAYER CONDUCT

Fine regarding the incident on October 24, 2021

Dear Mr. Rozanov, Our offices were alerted to an...

"And also," he says as he opens the email and skims it. "The league is fining me."

"What?" Shane asks, head whipping to look at Ilya. "What the fuck for?"

"For creating a hostile work environment and threatening a member of the press," Ilya says, reading it straight from the email.

"Oh, so they can fine you for defending yourself," Shane says, his calm finally fading. "But a dickhead member of the press can come in, *explicitly* state that your game sucks because your husband is on your team, and that's fine?"

"He did not say my game sucks," is all Ilya can say in reply.

"He might as well have!" Shane says as he throws his hands up. He's not yelling, but he is pretty agitated, which is basically yelling for Shane. "It's the third fucking week of the season. Who cares if you've gone five games without scoring a goal? The team — which you are the captain of, by the way — has won eight of their last ten games. Eight of the last ten!! Ottawa hasn't started a season like that since the fucking 70s!"

And even though Ilya is still pretty mad, and he knows that Shane is right, he can't help but smile. "Sweetheart," he says as he grabs Shane's hand. "Is just a small fine."

"I don't give a *shit* about the fine," Shane replies.

"Also," Ilya continues, hoping to ease some of Shane's frustration. "Harris said he banned him from the premises."

"Thank fuck, *someone* is taking this seriously," Shane grumbles.

Ilya just leans into Shane's space and kisses Shane soundly. The kiss seems to simmer some of Shane's frustration because he eventually breaks the kiss but doesn't pull away, keeping their foreheads pressed together.

"I'm sorry," Shane says, voice considerably calmer. "You said you weren't ready to talk about it, and I was trying to give you your space. It just, it *infuriates* me."

"I know," Ilya replies. "But you can say what you are thinking. I want to hear it."

Shane leans back slightly but holds onto his hand. "Look, you have every reason to be pissed off at this guy," Shane says. "And if you still need some space, you can have it. But I want you to know that just because you aren't putting pucks in the net *doesn't* mean that your game is bad."

Ilya almost interrupts him to make a joke about Shane saying his game is not bad, but Shane is still going.

"You're leading the league in assists," he says, counting on his fingers as he continues. "You have the most time on ice in the entire Eastern Conference, and you still find a way to dominate every single fucking game, like it's nothing. You have so many hits, the most on the team."

Shane finally stops to take a breath, and oh, how Ilya loves him. He wants to say that, but Shane starts talking again.

"Honestly, I've never seen you play at this level," Shane says. "You're in a different fucking league this year. I'm, I'm *honored* that I get to play with you, that I get to witness you at the top of your game."

"You think I am at the top of my game?" Ilya asks.

"Absolutely," Shane replies, immediately and earnestly. "The goals will come, and if they don't, you're still going into the Hall of Fame. But I somehow doubt that you've scored your last goal."

Ilya can't wait any longer. He pulls Shane in to kiss him. Breakfast has long been forgotten, and Ilya can't find it in him to care.

"Thank you," he says when they break away. "For believing in me."

Shane just smiles sweetly at him and says, "You make it easy."

—

Ilya scores a fucking hat trick at the next game.

Shane kisses him on the cheek after the third goal.

"What slump?" Shane asks, eyes bright with laughter.

What slump, indeed.

November 2021

Ilya knows that, between him and Shane, he's the more affectionate of the two. He's not sure if it's because he's from Europe, where everyone greets each other with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, or if it's because he grew up so starved for love and affection that he can't do anything except show Shane how much he loves him at any chance that he has.

So, yes, he knows that he's the one most likely to kiss Shane on the cheek when he skates by him at practice or come up behind Shane when he's cooking dinner just to wrap his arms around him or fall on top of Shane while he's reading on the couch, desperate to have his skin touching Shane's.

But, Shane... Shane loves Ilya differently. It's quieter. More intentional.

It's Shane sending Yuna when Ilya was sick and Shane was on a road trip.

It's Shane booking Anya for a spa day when Ilya mentions off-handedly that her nails are getting too long.

It's Shane remembering to grab Ilya's favorite jacket when they're leaving the cottage after a long weekend away and Ilya had forgotten he'd brought it.

It's Shane always having a loud action movie downloaded on his tablet for when they fly in case the memory of almost crashing threatens to overwhelm Ilya.

It's Shane buying Ilya a second phone charger and putting it in the bag Ilya uses for a carry-on because Ilya never remembers to bring it.

It's Shane hanging up the picture that Ilya gave him last Christmas of their CCM photoshoot, in the entryway of their home so they both see it every day.

It's Shane refusing to let go when Ilya's demons try to drag him down.

Ilya knows how lucky he is to be adored by Shane Hollander, but he still finds himself surprised sometimes.

Like now, after practice and a hot shower, when Ilya is standing in front of his stall in the Ottawa locker room, and Shane pokes him in the hip. He looks over to see Shane holding out a bottle of lotion.

"Hollander, I really do not think anyone wants to watch me give you a massage," he says with a wink as he takes it from Shane. He unscrews the top and sniffs it. It smells nice. Clean.

Troy walks by then and says, "Dear God, not in the locker room."

Shane turns a delightful shade of pink. "That's not what it's for!" he says to Troy before scowling at Ilya. Ilya might take him more seriously if his freckles didn't make him look so

fucking cute.

Ilya still hasn't gotten an answer when Shane starts pulling on the Ottawa Centaurs t-shirt he wore to practice this morning. Ilya notices that it hangs just a bit too big on Shane, and he knows that Shane definitely stole that from Ilya's side of the closet.

Ilya waits for an explanation, but it doesn't come. He finally nudges Shane's foot with his, and Shane looks over at him.

"What is it?" Ilya asks.

"It's goat's milk lotion," Shane replies, unhelpfully. He bends down to pull his track pants up, and Ilya is admittedly distracted by Shane's legs and the bruise hiding inside his left thigh from where Ilya bit him last night.

"Yes, I see that it is lotion," Ilya says with a shake of his head. He tries very hard not to roll his eyes, but he fails. "Why are you giving it to me?"

Shane's head briefly disappears as he pulls his sweater on, and when his head pops out of the neck, Ilya shakes the bottle again.

"You complain every winter that your skin gets dried out," Shane says. "I found it at the farmer's market a few months ago."

Shane is pulling on his socks and throwing athletic gear in his stall, and he doesn't seem to notice that Ilya is more confused now than he was when Shane gave him the bottle.

"A few months ago?" Ilya asks. "Why are you just now giving it to me?"

Shane finally looks over and sees Ilya's confusion. He shrugs before he says, "I noticed your hands this morning were all cracked, and the soap in the showers is awful. Dries everything out. I thought it might help."

"Oh," is all Ilya can say in response. Ilya looks at his hands and notices that the knuckles are, in fact, cracked, and the skin around his nails is dry. He hadn't even noticed.

But Shane had.

They try to keep PDA to a minimum while they're at the rink, for their teammates' sake and their own (although Shane would never admit that when Ilya shows restraint at practice, Shane goes nuts when they get home). But Ilya can't help himself right now. He leans over and kisses Shane on the top of his head, his hair wet and smelling of said dry soap. Shane leans into Ilya's side and brings his hand up to rest on Ilya's hip.

"Thank you, *moya koza*," Ilya says.

Shane's face scrunches up into the adorable pout he makes when he's trying to figure out what strange word Ilya has used as a petname. However, once he figures it out, he rolls his eyes. "Calling me a goat because I gave you goat's milk lotion is not clever."

Ilya just grins. "But it is funny."

Shane just rolls his eyes before standing up, fully dressed. Ilya still has his towel wrapped around his waist.

"Get dressed," Shane says as he slings his bag over his shoulder. "I'm ready to go home."

Ilya watches him walk toward the locker room entry, weighing the pros and cons of shoving Shane into the back of their SUV in the parking lot for a hand job. Shane would probably say no, but he might be able to convince him...

"Also, don't forget to ask Gary to order more of that stick tape you like," Shane says, looking over his shoulder as he walks out. "I'm tired of you bitching and stealing mine."

"But you are so cute when you get annoyed at me for borrowing yours," he yells as Shane disappears.

Shane's head pops back into the locker room. "You're on thin ice, Rozanov," Shane says, and then he's gone for real this time.

Ilya sighs contentedly. Then, a pair of dirty socks hits him in the head.

"Get a room," Troy says from a few stalls down.

He turns to look at Troy and *finally* starts to get dressed.

"Don't be jealous," Ilya replies as he pulls on his pants.

"I'm not jealous," Troy says. "Just tired of watching you eye-fuck Hollander."

"Would you rather watch me fuck Hollander for real?" he asks, smirk on his face.

Troy doesn't answer and instead turns to Dykstra and says. "Hey, Dykstra, you wanna DJ?"

"Hell yeah," Dykstra replies, already across the room and picking up the aux.

"No!" Ilya shouts. "Fine, I will stop teasing Barrett."

And Ilya doesn't say the next part because he *really* doesn't want to listen to Dykstra's music today, but he's definitely going to fuck Shane in the car when they get home.

January 2022

Ilya really fucking hates January.

He loves so many things about Canada, but the cold winters in Ottawa remind him of Moscow sometimes. He simultaneously misses it desperately and hates that he was raised there.

It's also the All-Star break, and they just got in from three days in Vancouver after being on the road for the previous *four* games. They spent most of December running from holiday parties to games to practice to another holiday party, rinse and repeat for the entire month. He feels like he's been burning both ends of the candle for weeks.

And, his mother died in January, and when it gets to be grey and cold, he sees her often in his mind, her skin grey and her hand hanging limply. He can still picture her as he shook her, begging her to wake up, before his father came in and dragged him away, screaming.

So, even though this is the first morning of their break, Ilya can't find the energy to pull himself out of bed. When Shane gets up for his run with Anya, he pulls the curtains closed and buries himself further into the sheets.

He's just so tired, and he wants to cry, but his emotions feel like they were scooped out of him, leaving him empty and exhausted.

Their front door opens again, and Ilya can hear Shane quietly talking to Anya, but he rolls over, hoping that Shane will leave him alone because he doesn't have the energy to talk.

He dozes off again, in a fitful sleep, and he distantly feels Shane kissing him on the crown of his head and Anya hopping up on their bed, curling up near him. He thinks he hears the shower running, but Shane could have turned on the white noise machine. He can't be bothered to figure it out.

A few hours pass before he comes to with Shane sitting on their bed, brushing his hand gently down Ilya's side. Ilya pulls the blankets down just enough for his eyes to peek out, and he fights the urge to hide again when he sees Shane's face fall.

"Oh, Ilya," Shane whispers. He leans down and presses a series of quick kisses to his forehead, his hand combing through Ilya's curls.

"Sorry," Ilya says, in an even more quiet whisper.

"For what?" Shane asks, eyebrows furrowing.

He just shrugs in response. Shane's eyebrows unfurrow. He knows.

Shane pulls the blankets down gently, revealing the rest of Ilya's face. He leans down and kisses Ilya, soft and chaste. When he pulls away, he presses another kiss to his nose, each of his cheeks, his eyes, his forehead. His hand is resting on Ilya's cheek the entire time.

"You have nothing to apologize for," Shane finally says, thumb rubbing along his cheekbone. "Can I hold you?"

Ilya barely has time to nod before Shane is pulling back the blankets and crawling in. He pulls Ilya close, guides Ilya's head to rest under chin. Ilya grips the neck of Shane's shirt like it's a life raft. In a way, it probably is.

"I miss her," Ilya finally says.

"Oh, baby," Shane replies, still carding his fingers through Ilya's hair. "I know you do. I'm so sorry."

Ilya just nods.

There's nothing left to say.

It's quiet for a long time as Shane holds Ilya, rubbing his hands up and down Ilya's back, occasionally gently kissing Ilya's face.

Eventually, Shane asks, "Do you want to go to the cottage?"

A bit of shock manages to bloom in Ilya's chest.

This is the kind of spontaneity that Shane usually doesn't partake in, but suddenly, Ilya wants nothing more than to be out of town, tucked away with Shane and Anya and nothing else.

But that's so much to ask of Shane. If they left in the next hour, it would be dark by the time they got there, and it's starting to snow again, and realistically, they would have two days at the cottage before they would need to be heading back to Ottawa. And they don't need to do that just because Ilya can't power through it, and *God*, Ilya doesn't deserve it. He doesn't deserve Shane's kindness or care or love or anything. He would be better off without Ilya, *happier*.

Shane squeezes him closer, breaking Ilya out of his thoughts. "Stop," Shane says. "I love you. I want to take you to the cottage."

And finally, *finally*, Ilya's eyes fill with tears, and Shane pulls him back slightly, kisses his cheeks as the tears start to fall.

"I do not deserve you," Ilya says.

Shane brings his hand up, wiping the tears away. "Ilya, you are the most wonderful person I've ever known, and I am so lucky that I get to love you for the rest of my life."

Ilya buries his head in Shane's chest and cries. Shane holds him through it, pressing kisses into his hair and whispering sweet nothings into his ear.

When the tears finally dry, Ilya pulls away from Shane, and Shane wipes the rest of the tears away before kissing him again.

"I want to go to the cottage," Ilya says, his voice rough but steady.

"Good," Shane replies. "Because I already packed our bags."

Ilya laughs.

So, Ilya gets out of bed and washes his face and brushes his teeth while Shane packs the car and secures Anya in the back seat.

When they get on the highway, the sun is setting, and flurries of snow are falling slowly. Shane reaches behind Ilya's seat and pulls out a soft cooler.

"You should eat something if you can," Shane says.

Ilya opens the cooler and finds sandwiches and chips and fresh cut fruit and Coke and Ginger Ale. He unwraps a sandwich and hands it to Shane before opening a can of Ginger Ale for him.

He manages to eat half of a sandwich, a few chips, and a good bit of fruit with a can of Coke before he can't eat anymore, and Shane tells him to rest. He steals Shane's jacket from the back seat and falls asleep with the music softly playing and Shane's hand on his knee.

He wakes up when the car stops. It's dark, and Ilya is a little groggy, but they're at the cottage.

"We didn't stop for groceries," Ilya says.

"I texted Mom and Dad before we left and told them we were coming," Shane explains. "They picked up some stuff for us."

Ilya picks up Shane's hand and kisses his knuckles.

"Want to get Anya out while I bring in our bags?" Shane asks.

Ilya nods and turns around to look at Anya. "Are you excited to be at the cottage?" he asks her.

She yips at him, so he gets out of the car and unhooks her harness, letting her jump out of the car and run into the grass to relieve herself in a dry spot.

When she's done, they head into the house, and both shake the snow off of themselves. Ilya hangs up his coat, toes off his shoes, and then takes Anya's little snow boots off, leaving it all in a heap on a chair by the door. Ilya walks past the kitchen and settles into the couch that faces the lake, not bothering to turn on any lights. The moon is full, and Ilya just stares at the water as more snow falls, covering the landscape in a hush.

Ilya hears Shane walking in and out of the house, putting bags in their bedroom, hanging up coats, getting out food, and Ilya is so in love that his heart hurts.

"I love him so much," he says as he looks at the moon, knowing she hears him.

Shane comes down a little later with a plate of pasta and a blanket. "Looks like Dad made your favorite," Shane says.

He covers Ilya with the blanket before handing him the pasta, and then he turns on a few of the lamps. When he's satisfied with the setup, he sits next to Ilya, pulling him into his side. Ilya covers him with the blanket, too, and they share the pasta. Distantly, he can hear loons calling, but the sound doesn't startle Ilya anymore.

Later, Shane will take him to bed, and he'll tuck Ilya under his chin and press kisses into his hair until Ilya drifts off. Tomorrow or the next day, he'll call Galina, and she'll be proud of him for letting Shane in when he was drowning. And until Ilya's demons let go of him, Shane will give him what he needs, whether that's making sure he eats or holding him or giving him space or anything in between.

The darkness won't ever completely go away, but at least he knows that Shane will be there, on the good days and the bad.

March 2022

Ilya would absolutely never admit it, but Shane is a goddamn terror on the ice.

And it's not like Ilya doesn't know the reputation that he personally has. He's huge and imposing, and that's just his stature. He is a fucking pest on the ice, chirping anyone and everyone, doing anything to get in their heads. And, on top of all of that, he's damn good at hockey. So, Ilya Rozanov is a lethal combination that most people will do anything to avoid pissing off.

Shane, though... Shane is different. An entirely different level of terrifying.

Off the ice, Shane is the kindest person Ilya knows. He knows all of the names of their teammates' spouses and kids, plus he knows what everyone in the family is up to. He speaks to every person who is part of the Centaurs' organization, from the Zamboni driver to the owners' executive assistant. If a rookie gathers up the nerves to approach him for advice, he always makes the time, putting aside whatever he's working on to fully focus on the conversation. He will cut a check for a charity that another player on the opposing team mentions in passing when he skates by to chat during warm-ups.

But, on the ice...

Jesus.

Ilya would also never admit that he is thankful that he doesn't have to play against Shane anymore.

Shane is a different kind of beast on the ice, laser-focused on hockey and hockey only. He'll check players into the boards with all the force he has, the same player who he may have been talking to before the game started. When the other team tries to get under his skin, he doesn't acknowledge the shit talk, and instead, he skates fucking circles around everyone. He has that annoying way of getting under their skin by just ignoring them and putting the puck on net again and again and again until the other team doesn't have the breath or energy to even formulate chirps. Honestly, Shane is seeing the game six plays ahead of everyone else.

It's like that meme Harris showed him one time: Ilya looks like he could kill you but is a cinnamon roll, and Shane looks like a cinnamon roll but could kill you.

So yes, after 13 years playing against (and sometimes, and most recently, *with*) Shane on the ice, he knows that there is a deadliness to Shane's game that few actually see.

Which is how Ilya knows that the St. Louis Jazz don't realize the storm that is brewing in Shane motherfucking Hollander.

The good news is that they're currently up 4-2 thanks to goals from Shane, Troy, Luca, and him, and there are only five minutes left in the game. If they win tonight, Ottawa secures home ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs while St. Louis is mathematically eliminated. Ilya is counting on it.

The bad news is that it's been a grind most of the night. St. Louis is full of huge guys who have no problem stapling the Cens to the boards every chance that they get, often to deafening cheers because, *of course*, Ottawa is on the road tonight. Ilya's left shoulder is fucking killing him, and the physios have been helping him stretch it almost every time he finishes a shift. Troy is currently getting a cut on his chin bandaged, fuming because it's from a missed high stick call. Bood is seething, and even sweet Luca is red-faced and focused.

And probably most troubling is that Shane hasn't said anything in an alarmingly long amount of time.

The worst news is that there's a rookie on the Jazz, Tyler Williamson, who apparently can't stand the thought of being eliminated from the Cup race by the gayest hockey team in the MLH, and he's been non-stop all night. Every time he steals a puck or checks someone into the boards, he's talking about how the Centaurs are all cocksuckers or some other worse but equally uninspired slur. The refs have reprimanded him a couple of times, but it's done nothing to deter him.

On Ilya's last shift, Williamson spewed some more bullshit when they got tangled up right in front of the Cens' bench, battling for the puck. Thankfully, the shit was only directed at Ilya and hadn't brought Shane into it (this time), and Ilya managed to get the puck from him while Williamson was more focused on reminding Ilya that he likes to fuck men, a fact that Ilya has known for a long time and is not actually news, thank you very much.

The problem was when he got back to the bench, everyone was laser-focused on Ilya. Unfortunately, Shane's line was up next, so he was hopping over the boards with a new level of intensity all over his face that Ilya didn't immediately recognize, which didn't clarify anything.

"What did I miss?" Ilya asked before squirting some Gatorade in his mouth.

No one said anything, and if the angry way that Shane had been skating — like the ice had personally offended him — was any indication, it wasn't anything good.

When no one answered him, he looked over at Dykstra.

"We all heard it," Dykstra said.

"Heard what?" Ilya asked, still confused, but admittedly, he was also trying to keep up with Shane flying across the ice. He was going so god damn *fast*, and Ilya was somewhat concerned that Shane was going to lose an edge and hurt himself. Shane absolutely smashed a one-timer from the dot, but it pinged off the pipes before getting picked up by a Jazz d-man, Johnson or some other boring name. Shane cursed and beat his stick on the ice before he raced after the puck again.

"What Williamson said," Dykstra finally explained.

Shit.

Well.

Now, Ilya understands Shane's new and invigorated intensity.

Shane, Luca, and Tanner skate back to the bench, and the third line is off. Ilya tries to bump shoulders with Shane to pull him back from his fury, back to Ilya, but it's no use.

"God dammit, I'm fucking sick of this shit," Bood says from the other side of Ilya. He spits on the floor. "They're beating the shit out of us, the stripes aren't doing a goddamn thing, and if that fucking sniveling twit Williamson says one more thing, I'm going to grind him into dust."

"Don't worry," Shane says, breaking his silence but not looking away from the game. "I'm fucking done with this. Bood, let me take your spot on the next shift."

"Ab-so-fucking-lutely, Mr. Hollander-Rozanov," Bood replies.

Ilya barely manages not to groan because Bood is *not* helping the situation.

He looks back at Wiebe, who will hopefully object to his own team throwing their lines in the blender, but he's nodding. "Fucking *end this*," Wiebe says.

Fuuuuuuuuck.

The third line makes it back to the bench, and Shane is over the boards before Ilya can say anything. Ilya and Troy follow him after exchanging a look.

"I've never seen him like this," Troy says as they skate after Shane.

St. Louis puts one on net that Wyatt smothers, and the refs whistle the play dead and signal that it's time for the last TV time-out.

Ilya skates up to Shane.

"Hollander," Ilya says.

"Rozanov," Shane replies, eyes focused completely on Williamson, who does not realize Shane is glaring daggers at him or is just ignoring Shane. Ilya honestly can't tell.

"It's not worth it," Ilya says.

"Agree to disagree," Shane replies.

"*Shane*," Ilya says again, practically begging him to drop it. When Shane doesn't answer him, Ilya continues with a sigh, "Can you at least not get suspended?"

"No promises," he says before skating off.

With a deep and exasperated sigh, Ilya skates over to Wyatt to check in, who states, "Shane's out here."

He says it casually, like he's talking about the traffic on the way here and not the love of Ilya's life, who is about to fight someone twice his size.

"Yes," Ilya says.

"I've never seen him like this," Wyatt says.

"That is also what Barrett said," Ilya replies.

"Man, Williamson isn't going to know what hit him," Wyatt finishes with a low whistle.

And if that isn't the understatement of the century.

They've got 15 seconds until the TV timeout is done, and Shane skates to the side of the face-off circle, right next to Williamson, still glaring daggers.

Ilya signals for Troy to take the face-off so he's near Williamson and Shane if they immediately drop gloves. He can't jump in, obviously, but maybe he can pull Shane off of him before his husband takes a punch to his pretty face.

The ref skates over to the dot, waiting for the go-ahead to drop the puck, and Shane leans closer to Williamson.

"You know what I think, Williamson," Shane asks.

"I don't have anything to say to a fairy like you," Williamson replies. Again, the insults are *so* unoriginal.

"I think," Shane continues, ignoring Williamson's reply. "That you're so pent up because you secretly want to be bent over and fucked by one of us, but no one will even spare your ugly mug a glance."

Williamson splutters, but he manages to recover enough to say, "In your fucking dreams, Hollander."

"No," Shane replies. "In *your* dreams."

Shane times that reply perfectly, pushing Williamson as the ref drops the puck. Troy wins the face-off, and he shoots it toward Shane, who catches it on the tape and is speeding down the ice.

Williamson hurtles after Shane, and he almost catches up to him just as Shane is reaching their bench.

Shane turns just slightly, scanning the ice for something, and then Ilya sees it. Williamson is racing toward Shane, shoulder lowered and elbow thrown out, and Ilya starts to shout at Shane to *get out of the way*, and for a second, they're in Montreal, and Williamson is Marleau, but they're not, they're *not*, because Shane ducks down, puck still on his stick.

And then, Williamson hits one of Shane's skates and *flies* over Shane, missing him completely, and landing in a heap on the fucking Ottawa Centaurs' bench.

But Shane somehow manages to hold onto the puck, and he's going, going, and Ilya is the only one keeping up. He drops the puck for Ilya to grab, and Ilya uses some fancy stick-handling to get past Johnson (or is it James?) before shooting it back across the ice to Shane, who buries it top-shelf.

"Fucking hell, baby!" Ilya shouts before he pushes Shane against the boards. He smacks a kiss on Shane's cheek, who *finally* breaks a smile before Troy joins them, wrapping them both in a hug.

"Fuck yeah, Hollander!" Troy shouts.

By the time they make it back to their bench, Williamson is *just now* getting back on the ice, and he's missing at least one tooth, and his nose looks broken. Blood is covering his face and jersey.

Serves him right.

Shane, Ilya, and Troy skate by him on the way to the bench, and Shane looks back at him.

"Looks like you just got your ass handed to you by a bunch of fairies," Shane says, and then he spits on the ice at Williamson's feet.

One of the other Jazz players comes by and pushes Williamson towards their bench, but Williamson doesn't look like he could respond even if he wanted to.

On the bench, the Cens pile on Shane.

"That was the best thing I've ever seen, Hollzy!"

"Don't fuck with Shane Hollander!"

"That'll make the highlights, *god damn!*"

Ilya can't make out who says what over the refs announcing that there is no penalty on the play, and the goal stands. Ottawa is up 5-2.

They all somehow manage to get louder, and Wiebe has to shout to be heard.

"Gentlemen," he yells. "We have a game to finish!" They settle down, and he sends the fourth line out to shut down the Jazz for the last minute.

Shane finally settles on the bench next to Ilya, and Ilya leans over and kisses him on the cheek again with a loud smack.

"That was fucking beautiful, *moya lyubov*," Ilya says.

"Well," Shane says, his smile sharp and *so* fucking sexy. "That will teach him to fuck with *my* husband."

Ilya's stomach swoops, overwhelmed, once again, with love for his husband, who would do anything to protect him.

June 2022

All things considered, game 5 in the Cup Finals is going... well.

Hell, if Ilya wasn't trying to be cocky and overconfident and potentially ruin everything, he would say it was going *really* well.

Sure, he would have loved to have won game 4 in San Jose and be on their victory tour, but Ilya can't say that winning in Ottawa, in front of their fans, isn't better.

It would also be better if Troy wasn't currently on the bench, nose pinched as he tries to stop the bleeding from taking an elbow to the face. But, it does mean Shane is on the ice with Ilya as the seconds quickly tick away, inching closer to them winning the fucking Cup.

Jesus Christ.

The fucking Cup

Ilya wants it so fucking bad. He doesn't know if he's ever wanted anything as much as he wants *this*, wants to win and win *with Shane*, and he's so close, he can fucking taste it.

He quickly flicks his eyes up to the Jumbotron, checking the time.

18 seconds

Ilya easily strips the puck away from a San Jose defenseman at the blue line and spins with it on his stick before shooting it across the ice to Shane, who hasn't stopped smiling since 2 minutes into the third when Luca hit a one-timer into the back of the net to put the Centaurs up 3-0.

God, Ilya doesn't think that he has ever loved Shane as much as he does at *this moment*.

Shane, who saw him outside of that rink in Saskatchewan and approached him, who intertwined their stories and never looked back.

Shane, who believed in them when Ilya was too scared.

Shane, who couldn't stand the thought of them not being together, who spent half the night trying to figure out how they could keep each other, who woke Ilya from a dead sleep and said he wanted what they had for years, for as long as possible.

Shane, who covered Ilya's living room in candles and asked to spend the rest of their lives together.

Shane, who left the only team he'd ever known and promised to build a dynasty in Ottawa with Ilya.

Shane, who supported every single member of this team, *Ilya's team*, who brought out the best in them because he led by example, because he did everything he could to make them *all* better.

Shane, who chose them, chose *Ilya* when it wasn't easy or smart.

Shane, who *keeps* choosing them, *keeps* loving Ilya, through the good, the bad, and everything in between.

Shane, his husband, the love of his life.

Shane, who just passed the puck to Bood to hold for the last few seconds of the game.

Shane, who is dropping his gloves and stick and racing across the ice to Ilya.

Ilya quickly drops his stick and gloves and strips off his helmet just in time to catch his husband. Ilya is laughing and maybe also crying, and Shane rips his helmet off and kisses him.

The crowd is roaring.

His heart is racing.

Shane grips the back of Ilya's head, kisses him again and again, kisses him until they can't kiss anymore because they're both smiling and crying.

The buzzer sounds.

"CENTAURS WIN," echoes through the arena. "THE OTTAWA CENTAURS HAVE WON THEIR FIRST CUP IN FRANCHISE HISTORY."

"I was supposed to kiss *you*," Ilya shouts.

Shane is opening his mouth to reply, but they're swarmed by the rest of the team, who are all hugging and shouting and laughing and crying.

Ilya has a tight grip on Shane. He's not letting him go anytime soon.

"We did it," Ilya shouts in Shane's ear. "We won the fucking Cup!"

"I'm so proud of you!" Shane replies. "You amaze me."

Ilya smiles at Shane, and Shane's smiling back at him, freckles scrunching up to form Ilya's favorite constellations.

His heart may burst from happiness.

—

Days pass.

They hold the Cup, Ilya first, Shane third after Bood. They kiss while Shane has it, each of them with one arm holding it up.

They drink beer from the Cup in the locker room, and Ilya sprays champagne on Shane and then licks the taste out of his mouth. They only break apart when Wyatt yells at them to get a room.

They get plastered between the locker room and the after party and the *after*-after party, take a ride share home, make out in the backseat like teenagers, break the lock on the front door trying to get in the house, have messy and uncoordinated sex on the dresser, and somehow break said dresser, but neither of them remembers how.

They sleep for a couple of hours and then wake up hungover. (Well, Shane is hungover. Ilya is fine because Russians don't get hangovers. Shane threatens to divorce him, but then Ilya makes him pancakes. Divorce is temporarily taken off the table.)

They have sex again, this time in their bed, slow and careful.

They go to a parade, where the streets of Ottawa are flooded with Centaurs' black and red and rainbow flags waving in the air. They give speeches in front of City Hall, Ilya's profanity-laced and Shane's earnest (and completely ignored by the crowd).

They pick up Anya from Shane's parents' house, and then they spend the afternoon with Yuna and David outside, drinking iced tea and watching Anya chase birds.

They fix the lock on the front door. Ilya blames Shane for the lock being broken, but they both know it's Ilya's fault because he was the one who kicked the door in when it was taking too long.

They spend one day rotting in bed, alternating ice packs and heating pads on sore shoulders and knees and backs and joints. They order pizza and eat it in bed, using the lid of the box as a plate. They change the sheets when Ilya inevitably spills sauce on them. Ilya blows Shane to make up for that and the broken lock. Shane returns the favor just because.

They do interviews for television, for radio, for papers, for blogs, for podcasts. They talk about training and how it paid off. They talk about the honor they feel at being role models. They talk about their teammates, the chemistry the team has, and how they're one big family. They talk about how amazing it is to not only win the Cup, but win it together. Shane gets choked up a few times, and Ilya just kisses the top of his head, so so so in love.

They spend the days filled with celebrations and the nights wrapped up in each other, entangled so closely that they can't tell where one of them ends and the other begins.

Days pass.

When the dust finally settles, it's them sitting on the couch with Anya curled up between them, watching trash television while Ilya rubs Shane's feet. Ilya keeps stealing glances at Shane, who is staring intently at his phone, gnawing on his lip while he focuses on something.

And then, Ilya's phone pings with a new notification.

He looks at Shane, who smiles shyly at him. Ilya begrudgingly stops digging his knuckles into Shane's arch, grabs his phone off the coffee table, and unlocks it.

@ShaneHollander24 has tagged you in a post.

He blinks, a little shocked. Shane rarely posts personal stuff on his Instagram. He mostly sticks to posts about the Irina Foundation and ads. In fact, Shane has posted three personal pictures on his Instagram: one of him with his parents, one of Anya on the dock at the cottage, and one from their wedding day, Ilya dipping him for their first kiss.

So, yes, he's curious about what Shane could have possibly posted.

Ilya clicks on the notification, and his screen fills with a picture that Ilya hasn't seen before.

It's a picture of Shane and Ilya, taken from the moment right after they kissed on ice before the buzzer sounded.

Ilya remembers the kiss, but he didn't remember the details. He sees them now, though. He sees how he's holding Shane off the ice and remembers that he'd caught Shane and literally swept him off his feet, lifting him slightly higher than Ilya. He sees the way they'd haphazardly thrown their sticks and gloves and helmets, leaving them scattered on the ice. He sees Shane's fingers tangled in Ilya's curls. In the background, he sees their teammates spilling off the Ottawa bench, a blurry mass of black and red.

He sees that he smiled wider than maybe he ever had before.

He sees that Shane was looking at Ilya like he hung the moon and placed the stars in the sky just for Shane.

"Oh," Ilya breathes.

Shane takes his feet out of Ilya's lap and scoots closer to him, Anya crawling into Shane's lap as he lays his head on Ilya's shoulder. Ilya wraps his arm around Shane.

"There's more," Shane says as he idly plays with the hem of Ilya's shirt, the other hand scratching Anya's head.

And there are. Ilya scrolls through them and studies each one.

There's a picture of them holding the Cup together, their free arms wrapped around the other.

There's a picture of them sitting on the floor of the locker room, Shane between Ilya's legs, each holding a champagne bottle. Ilya is grinning as he whispers something in Shane's ear, and Shane's head is thrown back as he laughs.

There's a picture of them at the parade, Ilya kissing Shane while he dips him, rainbow flags in the background behind them.

There's a picture of them on the blanket in Yuna and David's backyard, Shane with his legs stretched out and Ilya's head in his lap, Anya curled up on Ilya's stomach.

There's a picture of Ilya in their bed, pizza box in front of him, chest bare and waist covered with a sheet. He's making a face, and he can see a red stain on the white sheets.

Already, Ilya is awestruck by the thought Shane put into pulling these together, and then he realizes there are still more pictures.

The next one is their Ottawa jerseys, hanging in their adjoining stalls, but they're the ones Harris surprised them with before the first game of the Cup finals. In the place where their last names go is HOLLANDER-ROZANOV. Ilya is *just* in the frame, covering his smile as he looks at them.

The next one is from their wedding, taken during their first dance. They're smiling at each other with twinkling lights in the background.

The next one is from the Tampa Bay All-Star game, captured at the moment that Ilya is kissing Shane's helmet after they scored a goal, *their first goal*, together.

Ilya is fighting tears by the time he flips to the last one, and he swears his heart stops when he sees it.

It's a familiar picture to him now because he sees it every day in the entryway of their home.

It's the picture Ilya gave Shane all those years ago from the CCM shoot. The one where they're laughing, falling in love without realizing it.

He traces younger Shane's sweet face with his finger before he tilts his husband's face up so that he can kiss the Shane he has now, with longer hair and stubble and crow's feet and smile lines and a wedding band on his hand that ties him to Ilya.

"There's a caption, too," Shane says.

Ilya reluctantly scrolls down a little to see the caption.

ShaneHollander24: Every day with you has been an adventure, but this one has been my favorite yet. If you had told me 13 years ago that I'd win the Cup with my husband, I wouldn't have believed you, but you always find a way to surprise me, Ilya. You've been doing it since we were 17. You remind me of it every day. Ya lyublyu tebya,
@ReallyIlyaRoz.

He stares at the caption, reads it over and over until the words blur and his eyes sting. He tries to swallow past the lump in his throat but can't.

Jesus, he can't believe he gets to love Shane for the rest of his life.

Shane, who rarely posts about his personal life but just posted ten photos of their life together for the world to see.

Finally, he turns so he can see Shane, who is also teary. "I—" he starts, but he gets choked up again.

Shane brings a hand up to rest on Ilya's cheek. "Do you like it?" he asks.

"*Moya lyubov*," he finally manages. "I love it so much."

And because he can't help himself, he pulls Shane forward into a kiss. It's sweet and slow and gentle.

Ilya would kiss Shane for the rest of the day, but Shane pulls away.

"Good," Shane says. "Because I did something while you were outside on the phone with Svetlana."

Shane pats Anya on the head, and she jumps off the couch and curls up in her bed. He pulls Ilya to his feet and holds his hand as they walk out of the living room and toward the hallway of their entryway. He's nearly to the front door before he stops, and Ilya starts to make yet another joke about breaking the front door, but his eye catches what's on the wall.

"What is this?" he asks, dazed.

"What does it look like?" Shane replies as he squeezes Ilya's hand.

What it looks like is a few additions to the wall in their entryway. Now, around the CCM picture, Shane has hung all of the pictures Ilya saw on Instagram. All of them. The kiss on the ice, them holding the cup, the locker room, the parade, the backyard, their bed, their sweaters, their wedding, the All-Star game, they're all there, tracing a lifetime of love between them.

But those aren't the only additions.

Ilya walks forward, hovers his fingers over a picture of their plastic rings from their "wedding" at the Pikes' house.

"You got that from my Instagram," Ilya says, in awe.

Shane comes up behind Ilya, wraps his arms around his waist, and puts his chin on Ilya's shoulder. "Yeah, I've been busy," Shane replies.

Ilya takes all of the photos in. A selfie of the two of them on their honeymoon, both golden tan. A picture of Anya and Shane sleeping on the couch that Ilya has as his lock screen. One from a summer hockey camp, the two of them leaning against the boards and talking, smiles on both of their faces. Ilya on the dock at the cottage, the sun setting behind him. Them, curled up on the couch at Shane's parents' house, sleeping in tacky Christmas sweaters. A selfie from the awards show, all those years ago, the ones that Ilya moved over every time he got a new phone.

All of them are framed in black and strategically placed.

A wall of memories that shows the devotion they've always had for each other.

Ilya turns to face Shane and kisses him soundly.

"When did you get all of these?" he asks when they break away.

Shane shrugs with a smile.

"Well, I've been planning it," he says. "You know, laying it out so it makes sense. I had a bunch of these already, but I've been stealing all of my favorites from the last few days. I think these were the missing pieces." He pauses and studies the wall for a moment, surveying his work before he continues. "Anyway, they came in today, and I couldn't wait anymore."

As Ilya looks at Shane — who displayed their love for one another in the entryway of their home, a space their families and friends and teammates and, one day, their kids will pass every time they walk in — he sees the vision that Shane was creating.

Because here is the thing: Ilya has loved Shane for nearly half of his life, and he falls in love with him more and more every day. He knows, in his soul, that Shane feels the same, that every day, he finds new ways to care for and love Ilya.

Now, anyone who comes into their home can see it, too.

But he doesn't know how to say any of that, and honestly, Shane knows it already.

So, instead, he kisses him again before he pulls back to press their foreheads together.

"Thank you," Ilya finally says. "For loving me like you do."

"Right back at you," Shane says.

They stand in silence for a minute, looking at the wall together.

"Is nice," Ilya finally says. "But we might have a problem."

Shane's eyebrows furrow. "What's wrong?" He's looking at the wall, studying it to find the flaw.

"Now, everyone who comes over will feel bad," Ilya explains.

Shane's eyebrows unfurrow so he can roll his eyes. "Oh, yeah?" he asks. "Why?"

"Well," Ilya says, smiling. "Now, people have to know that we are sexier than them *and* more in love than they are."

"Oh well," Shane replies, pulling Ilya down to kiss him. When he breaks away, he says, "They can get over it. It's our home."

"Not very welcoming of you," Ilya says. "Makes you a bad host."

"Oh, I'll show you a bad host."

Ilya presses Shane against the wall opposite the photos and kisses him.

"Come on," Ilya says when he finally pulls away, taking Shane by the hand and moving them away from the wall and toward the stairs up to their room. "Let's find some more furniture to break."

Shane groans. "Please don't." But he's following Ilya up the stairs.

Later, after they've managed to have sex without breaking furniture (much to Ilya's dismay), they go back downstairs. Shane goes into the kitchen to start dinner, and Ilya finds himself drawn to the wall again.

He looks at the pictures, traces their story through their smiles.

And he's struck with one thought, a thought that he's had a thousand times since they met.

How lucky Ilya Rozanov is to be loved by Shane Hollander.

UPDATE - 2026.02.15

I couldn't get the story of Shane and Ilya breaking the dresser after they win the Cup out of my head, so I wrote it into existence. It's called *the sign on your heart said it's still reserved for me*, and you can find it [HERE](#). I hope you enjoy it!

UPDATE - 2026.01.20

After a few requests, I published a small epilogue to this story that follows the internet's reaction to Shane's Instagram post. It's called *yours, until the poets run out of rhyme*, and you can find it [HERE](#). I hope you enjoy it!

I honestly can't believe that I wrote nearly 13,000 words in the LAST TWO WEEKS. In the middle of the holidays. With a head cold. And working on a ginormous rebrand that launches in less than 12 hours at my silly little corporate job. Hollanov really has their hooks in me, y'all.

—

TIDBITS & FUN FACTS

- I'm a Chicago Blackhawks girl through and through, so I say this with my full chest: *fuck* the St. Louis Blues. That's why the team Shane obliterates is St. Louis.
 - The move that Shane makes to destroy that kid is loosely based on [this failed hit by Jacob Trouba](#).
 - There are 17 photos on the wall, a nod to how old they were when they met. And yes, their future kids and grandkids end up on the wall, too, but they do have to find a bigger wall in their house for them.
 - I had to look up the average length of an NHL game. This is particularly sad considering I've been a hockey fan for more than a damn decade, but here we are.
 - I also had to research a complete timeline of the Game Changers series. Listen, I have a hard time believing that Shane and Ilya were together FOR FOUR YEARS before they got married. My poor babies. No wonder The Long Game is so angsty. Also, I should remind everyone that I wrote sections of this on cold medicine, so math was more difficult than usual.
 - This fic was entirely fueled by [my Hollanov Spotify playlist](#).
-

Thanks for reading! If you liked it, please comment, recommend it to your friends, give me a kudos, or something to let me know you enjoyed it. Your notes fuel me. :D

Otherwise, stop by my online profiles and say hi!

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Works inspired by this one

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